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NEWS

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CATHOLIC NUNS BECOME CAMPERS

MISSOULA---

Two Catholic nuns, studying for master's degrees at the University of Montana, have become avid outdoorsmen.

Both sisters are teachers in Catholic high schools in Massachusetts. Sister William Julie Hurley, Hudson, and Sister Catherine George Shields, Peabody, had their names shortened by their male classmates to Bill and George.

Their studies in biology and ecology take them into the field and away from their headquarters at the UM's Biological Station on Flathead Lake. When in the field, the entire class camps out.

Sister Bill said that her first night camping out was near Forsyth between the highway and the railroad. She claims to have heard every car and train that passed that night and got not one minute's sleep. "Even if it had been quiet," she stated, "I was too excited to sleep."

On some occasions, two other women joined them for the field trips. Otherwise they were the only members of their sex among 15 males. They either shared their own tent or slept in the back of trucks. Sister George said that the men went to great lengths to provide them with privacy.

Their normal habit includes a black knee length dress but in the field they wear a denim fabric dress with boots. Each carries a pack, binoculars, and camera.

The cameras they rate high among their equipment. The photos of bear, elk and moose, they claim, may be the only contact with big game that some of their students will ever have, outside of a zoo.

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Both are impressed by the friendliness of the west. They would like to be able to bring their students to the west to see the scenery, wildlife and meet the friendly people.

One of their finest experiences was visiting with classmates around a campfire. Their contacts with students of other nations and faiths gave them a broader outlook which they call their "educational bonus."

Their most frightening experience was a near-miss from a rattlesnake at Medicine Rocks State Park near Ekalaka. One of their male classmates killed the snake.

Both claim they are physically stronger from hiking and climbing and while they enjoy the west, they are anxious to get back home to share their experiences.

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